

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project EASI (Easy Access for Students and Institutions) is an effort by members of the postsecondary education community to define and to implement a customer-focused "system" to support postsecondary education. Within Project EASI, Project EASI/ED (Easy Access for Students and Institutions/US Department of Education) represents ED's initial effort to implement the Project EASI vision within the scope of its business processes and systems. ED's focus is on reengineering the 12 financial aid systems and associated processes used to manage and deliver postsecondary student financial aid authorized under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended.

The purpose of the *Project EASI/ED Transition Strategy* is to define a strategy for planning and managing the transition from the current Title IV systems and processes to those envisioned for EASI/ED. This strategy is reflected in the schedule and transition management organization depicted in this document. The *Project EASI/ED Transition Strategy* is intended to be a tool to guide ED managers and supporting contractors in more detailed planning and execution of EASI/ED activities. Given this, it is expected to be a living document. The current Transition Plan reflects one path to accomplish the transition. As more is learned regarding the organization, as requirements change, as technology evolves, and as decisions are made regarding system-wide design and each subsystem's implementation, the *Transition Strategy* should be updated to reflect the impact or changes to the strategy.

Six application subsystems have been defined for Project EASI/ED:

- Aid Application
- Aid Origination and Disbursement
- Aid Repayment
- Financial Services
- Program Management and Oversight (PMOS)
- Decision Support System (DSS)

Four options for implementing EASI/ED functionality within these subsystems were considered during the definition phase of Project EASI/ED: outsourcing, reuse, COTS software, and custom software development. A fifth option, reengineering, was added during the development of the Project EASI/ED Transition Plan. Each EASI/ED subsystem may be delivered via one or more of these implementation options. The table below shows the results of initial analysis regarding which implementation options might be suitable to each EASI/ED subsystem.

Project EASI/ED Subsystems	Reuse Project	COTS Project	Reengineering Project	Custom Project	Outsource Project
Financial Services		X			
Aid Application	X	X		X	X
Program Management and Oversight	X	X	X	X	X
Aid Origination and Disbursement	X			X	X
Aid Repayment	X	X		X	X
Decision Support System		X			

**Table 1 Potential Project EASI/ED Subsystem Implementation Options**

The EASI/ED transition schedule reflects one set of possible implementation options to deliver required functionality. Although the options presented do not represent final decisions regarding

how EASI/ED must be implemented, the schedule provides important and durable insight into principal activities required to implement the system and into the relative timing and sequencing of these activities. Final decisions regarding which approach to use for each subsystem must be based upon cost/benefit analyses performed as the transition progresses. In the interim, the transition schedule reflects ED preferences to follow a COTS-like approach by maximizing the use of COTS software to complement selective reuse of existing applications. Current applications selected for reuse are “packaged” to provide complete, integrated functionality, much as a COTS product does.

The subsystem implementation sequence shown in the EASI/ED transition schedule was selected by first determining which sequence would minimize the number of bridges between current systems and EASI/ED subsystems required to facilitate the transition. This sequence was then modified slightly by moving the Financial Service subsystem from third to first place in the implementation order. ED managers requested this change so that accounting and financial management functionality required to support all of the Title IV aid programs would be in place before other subsystems that use this functionality are implemented. The resulting sequence is:

1. Financial Services subsystem
2. Aid Application subsystem
3. Program Management and Oversight Subsystem
4. Aid Origination and Disbursement subsystem
5. Aid Repayment subsystem
6. Decision Support subsystem

EASI/ED is planned for a phased implementation. Initially, system-wide design work and implementation of key infrastructure will occur. Subsequently, EASI/ED subsystems will be implemented in four distinct phases of activity. Within phases, ED will use multiple contract awards to ensure the best balance of continuity and specialized skills to complete the required work. Financial Services and Aid Application subsystems comprise Phase I of the transition. PMOS is implemented in Phase II. Phase III comprises the Aid Origination and Disbursement subsystem and the Aid Repayment subsystem. Phase IV completes subsystem implementation with the DSS. Table 2 shows the start and end dates for each phase of Project EASI/ED, where the start date represents the beginning of acquisition work relating to that phase, and the end date represents when the functionality within that phase will become operational.

Project EASI/ED Phase	Phase Start	Phase End
Phase I	10/01/1998	12/28/2000
Phase II	12/31/1998	5/07/2002
Phase III	7/30/1999	3/04/2003
Phase IV	9/06/2000	11/20/2003

**Table 2 Project EASI/ED Phases**

The *Transition Strategy* schedule is primarily important as a tool for understanding the expected tasks, their durations, and the relationships among major elements of Project EASI/ED. The schedule is expressed in terms of calendar dates beginning October 1, 1998, although this does not reflect an agreed-upon start date for the work. Although ED reviewers requested that the schedule be expressed in terms of generic dates at this point -- i.e., Year 1, Year 2, Year N -- this was not possible within the scheduling tool. More importantly, that schedule representation would imply greater scheduling flexibility than is actually available for EASI/ED. There are four primary events that are sensitive to actual calendar dates:

- Implementation of the Application Subsystem needs to be aligned with the annual business cycle for receipt and processing of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, which runs from January to January each year.
- Implementation of the Aid Origination and Disbursement subsystem must align with the annual business cycle for Direct Loan originations, which runs from March to March each year.
- Implementation of the Aid Repayment subsystem must occur not later than the end of calendar year 2003, the latest date that the current systems can support requirements.
- Current contracts will expire on specified calendar dates. If the transition schedule changes substantially, ED will likely need to recompile or to renegotiate a higher number of contracts. The proximity of EASI/ED implementation activities to contract end dates must also be carefully examined to minimize negative impact on EASI/ED implementation schedules.

Thus, if the transition schedule needs to change, the dates associated with each item listed above need to be examined carefully -- a simple month-for-month slip of the plan is not workable.

The broad scope of EASI/ED is the key to its complexity. The EASI/ED transition will touch both systems and organizations, internal and external to ED, through multiple parallel activities. These parallel paths within the transition must enable work to progress relatively independently, while remaining coordinated and being managed to ensure they meet at a common target. EASI/ED success requires very strong, dedicated program management by mature technical and functional experts. In addition, to hold the disparate projects and subprojects together and to ensure that system-wide integrity of design is maintained, a strong system integrator is required for this effort.